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SUBJECT: SPD WINS BERLIN ELECTION; OUTCOME REFLECTS LOCAL
FACTORS

REF: BERLIN 2546

¶1. (U) As widely expected, Berlin's SPD won the Sept. 17 state election, taking 30.9 percent of the vote, up slightly since the 2001 election. The SPD will have the option of forming a government with either the Left Party.PDS or the Greens, both of which took just over 13 percent of the vote. Either coalition will have only a one-vote majority in the Berlin legislature. Before the election, Mayor Wowereit (SPD) had indicated a preference for renewing the coalition with the Left Party.PDS. The conservative Christian Democrats, led by Defense State Secretary Friedbert Pflueger, performed poorly, taking only 21.2 percent, down slightly from 2001. Likewise, the liberal Free Democrats also lost votes, taking only 7.6 percent.

¶2. (U) The poll was marked by a very low turnout of only 59 percent of voters and by the high percent of the vote (nearly 14) given to parties which did not clear the 5 percent hurdle for entry into parliament. The latter enables the SPD to gain a majority of seats with either the LP.PDS or Greens, despite having under 45 percent of the popular vote with either party. In addition, the far-right NPD performed slightly better than expected, gaining seats in four Berlin district assemblies, including one in the west.

¶3. (U) Comment: Though the NPD performed slightly better than expected in some districts, city-wide the party fell far below the five percent hurdle for election to the state parliament. The election should also not be seen as a referendum on the national government or Chancellor Merkel. Local factors, especially CDU internal weaknesses and the CDU mayoral candidate's lack of personal appeal, more than account for the CDU's poor result. End Comment.

TIMKEN JR